



Lim Sokchanlina/SaSa Bassac

Artworks by Cambodian and Australian artists are showcased in 'new artefacts,' currently on display at Phnom Penh's SaSa Bassac gallery.

Works in Progress

A new exhibition showcases the artistic process rather than the finished product

BY JULIETTE HOPKINS • THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The working materials of artists—notebooks, paint palettes and sketches—do not usually feature in art exhibitions. But in the latest show at SaSa Bassac gallery, Australian curator Roger Nelson draws attention to these objects as a way to explore the creative process of art itself.

The exhibited artworks in 'new artefacts' are pieces that originally did not fit within a series, or were edited out by the artist in the selection process. The focus is not on the final product, the objet d'art, but on the processes that go into producing it: the gathering, sorting, collating and editing that takes place before the final object is delivered.

"I suppose it's a bit of an experiment," Mr. Nelson said in an interview this week at the Sasa Bassac gallery. "I thought that if you have something left over, rather than the final, beautiful product, it would be easier to use those objects to see the larger picture."

Mr. Nelson admits that 'new artefacts' is no ordinary exhibition.

"When you go to see a normal art exhibition, you look at the final object and not much else," he said. "Because the objects in this exhibition are different from that...maybe it forces us to use these works as a springboard to bet-

ter understand the artist's process."

The group exhibition, on show until September 2, brings together eight established and emerging artists from Cambodia and Australia and is supported by the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh.

Entering SaSa Bassac's white cube space, the artworks appear to be competing for attention. One hundred colorful toy planes, handmade by audiences as part of the 2009 project "In-Flight" by husband-and-wife team Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan, adorn the wall. A blue tarpaulin, set up in the center of the room, invites audiences to watch a longer selection of footage taken from Svay Sareth's original 20-minute video, "Mon Boulot," exhibited earlier this year at the French Institute.

The works cover a full range of mediums and engage with a breadth of scholarly and creative discourses. Drew Pettifer's piece explores homosexual desire and masculinity, while Clare McCracken considers community participation through public art. At times, the sheer variety of works and themes appear discordant and it becomes a struggle to draw a common thread between them.

Yet, this is not Nelson's primary concern. His emphasis after all is on process rather than product and, in that sense, his somewhat ex-

perimental curatorial style provides some valuable insights into the creative process itself.

The exhibition gives fresh perspectives on already well-known local artists. The late Svay Ken is recognized for his life-like depictions of everyday scenes, but 'new artefacts' includes a canvas used by the artist as a kind of palette for mixing paint. "I suppose you could say it's not really a painting at all," said Mr. Nelson.

"It's been fun showing that as people familiar with his work aren't used to seeing him work in such an abstract style," he added.

The exhibition also facilitates creative exchanges between the artistic communities in Australia and Cambodia, while introducing some novel forms and practices to local audiences. Of particular note, is a 45-minute sound piece by Christian Thompson, a celebrated Indigenous Australian artist. Audiences are invited to listen via headphones to "Decent Extremist," originally shown at the Adelaide Biennial in 2010, where he replicates the sound of a bee swarm by repeating the words "muna" (single bee) and "nguwal" (many bees) in his native Bidjara tongue.

Nelson admits that Cambodian audiences' reaction so far have been "mixed." "A lot of audiences I suppose find it strange and funny," he said. Yet, this is precisely one of the challenges for contemporary art—to be new, to be of its time and to get audiences to think outside the box of "well-made pictures."